

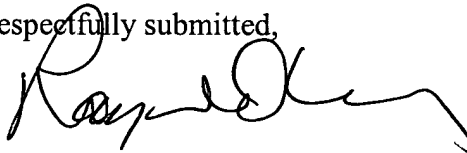
### REMARKS

This Preliminary Amendment is filed in order to enter the complete chain of continuing data.

The claims have been amended to eliminate improper multiple dependent claims and to place the claims in better form for examination in accordance with United States practice. Please enter the Preliminary Amendment before calculating the filing fees.

It is not believed that extensions of time or fees for net addition of claims are required, beyond those that may otherwise be provided for in documents accompanying this paper. However, in the event that additional extensions of time are necessary to allow consideration of this paper, such extensions are hereby petitioned under 37 CFR § 1.136(a), and any fee required therefore (including fees for net addition of claims) is hereby authorized to be charged to Deposit Account No. 16-0605.

Respectfully submitted,

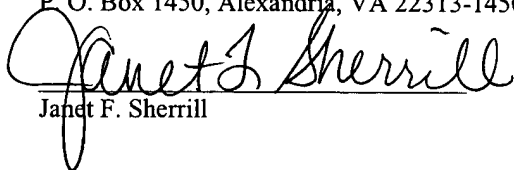


Raymond O. Linker, Jr.  
Registration No. 26,419

Customer No. 00826  
**ALSTON & BIRD LLP**  
Bank of America Plaza  
101 South Tryon Street, Suite 4000  
Charlotte, NC 28280-4000  
Tel Charlotte Office (704) 444-1000  
Fax Charlotte Office (704) 444-1111

### CERTIFICATE OF MAILING

I hereby certify that this correspondence is being deposited with the United States Postal Service with sufficient postage as first class mail in an envelope addressed to: Mail Stop Non-Fee Amendments, Commissioner for Patents, P. O. Box 1450, Alexandria, VA 22313-1450, on March 10, 2004.

  
Janet F. Sherrill